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C O N F I D E N T I A L ABUJA 001409

SIPDIS

NOFORN

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SUBJECT: WARRI CRISIS UPDATE 19AUG03

REF: ABUJA 13576 AND PREVIOUS

1. (U) Classified by Counselor James Maxstadt for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

2. (C) Summary: Violent clashes between Itsekiri and Ijaw militants continued in Warri town through August 19, according to press reports and local observers in Warri. The death toll since August 15 is at least 50, probably much higher. Governor Ibori is returning from vacation, and the military may take action this weekend. End Summary.

3. (C) A Nigerian worker for U.S. NGO "IFESH" reported to CRO August 19 that intense fighting continued in the morning of the 19th and, at one point, army personnel retreated from the area of fighting. By noon, however, fighting had died down as the army deployed a larger force to the affected area. According to the NGO contact, armed militants of the Egbema clan of the Ijaw have joined the FNDIC militants (dominated by the Gbaramatu clan of the Ijaw) in the fight against the Itsekiri. FNDIC leader Dan Ekpeditibe told CRO in an August 19 phone conversation that the situation had calmed a bit by 1600 local in the port area, but the Itsekiris were now making attacks on Warri town by land. He complained that the state government was showing a pro-Itsekiri bias during the fighting and wanted the federal government to step in and take control of Warri affairs.

4. (C) Delta State Governor James Ibori's personal assistant confirmed to CRO that Ibori has broken off his vacation in the UK and will return to Warri at noon on August 20. The Governor will immediately tour the Warri town area affected by the recent fighting. He will also convene an emergency meeting of ethnic leaders and security forces chiefs.

FOUR SOLDIERS KILLED

5. (C/NF) The DATT reports that the military task force in Warri, consisting of six battalions, is under the command of MajGen Qwenbe who has been appointed "Director of Operations in Warri." In an August 19 meeting with DATT, Qwenbe confirmed that four army soldiers were killed in exchanges with the militants over the August 15-17 weekend. The General also stated that the long-awaited operation against the militants would commence over the August 22-24 weekend.

CTX STILL OPERATING, SHELL CLOSED IN WARRI

6. (C/NF) ChevronTexaco (CTX) General Manager for Public and Government Affairs Sola Omole reports that CTX's offices in Warri remain open; 90 percent of local staff showed up for work today. Omole also reported to CRO that the Warri airport remains open and crew changes to/from the CTX terminal at Escravos continue from the Warri airport. Shell's Security Manager Mike Achu reports that the Shell office in Warri, however, has been closed since August 18 as a precaution.
ROBERTS